



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***SOCIAL CAPITAL OF NGO FOOD SUPPORT PROVIDERS FOR THE  
HOMELESS IN KUALA LUMPUR***

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**SOCIAL CAPITAL OF NGO FOOD SUPPORT PROVIDERS FOR THE  
HOMELESS IN KUALA LUMPUR**

By  
**PRESCIOUS ANN SANTOS ORIA**

**Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra  
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Science**

**May 2015**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in  
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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**PRESCIOUS ANN SANTOS ORIA**

**May 2015**

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The aim of this paper is to provide a descriptive analysis of the role of Non-Governmental Organizations that provide food to the homeless in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Using in-depth interview and participant observation as the method of data gathering, this study focuses on the social capital aspect amongst the NGOs specifically in identifying whether bonding or bridging is represented in social capital. By identifying the presence of Social capital, these two assumptions would be addressed: (1) there are certain days when homeless may receive no food, and (2) there are certain days when homeless may receive an oversupply of food. This study then seeks to explore the role of NGOs and the relationships existing among these organizations for the development of the homeless community. Moreover, three concepts were highlighted throughout the process namely trust, network and collaboration as yardsticks in identifying the organizations existing social capital. Seven NGOs serve as the subject of this study. All the transcriptions were analyzed qualitatively using Nvivo. Results of the study showed that trust exists among NGOs and this trust rests both in their organization as well in other organizations. NGOs also work more individually rather than working collaboratively with other NGOs working with the homeless but it has to be highlighted that NGOs work together in a certain extent though collaboration is not a usual action. Nevertheless, they have strong networks ranging from small to big corporations found within and outside these NGOs. It is therefore concluded that in the context of this study, NGO food support providers to homeless in Kuala Lumpur operate in between bonding and bridging types of social capital. This "Bonding-Bridging SC" suggests the feature of moralistic trust whereby trust is based on their faith that goodwill rests on other NGOs which is essential for civic engagement. With this kind of existing social capital amongst the NGOs, food provision to the homeless people in Kuala Lumpur is manageable as food and other services are monitored and NGOs are aware to each other NGO's programs. In the issue of homeless community development, these NGOs could further extend their collaboration for a wider

and greater impact especially that issue on homelessness in KL continues to escalate.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**MODAL SOSIAL DALAM KALANGAN NGO YANG MEMBEKALKAN  
BANTUAN MAKANAN KEPADA GOLONGAN GELANDANGAN DI KUALA  
LUMPUR**

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Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mendapatkan satu analisis yang lebih mendalam berkenaan dengan peranan Badan Bukan Kerajaan (NGO) yang membekalkan makanan kepada golongan gelandangan di Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Dengan menggunakan kaedah temu bual dan pemerhatian untuk mendapatkan data yang diperlukan, kajian ini memfokuskan kepada aspek modal sosial dalam kalangan NGO khususnya dalam mengenalpasti sama ada ia adalah sebagai satu bentuk ikatan ataupun rapatan modal sosial. Dengan mengenalpasti kewujudan modal sosial, terdapat dua andaian yang dapat dijawab iaitu: (1) Terdapat beberapa hari tertentu golongan gelandangan tidak menerima bekalan makanan, dan (2) Terdapat beberapa hari tertentu golongan gelandangan akan menerima makanan yang berlebihan. Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti peranan NGO dan hubungan kewujudan NGO ini terhadap perkembangan komuniti golongan gelandangan. Tambahan pula, terdapat tiga konsep yang paling penting sepanjang proses ini iaitu kepercayaan, hubungan dan kerjasama sebagai kayu pengukur dalam mengenalpasti organisasi modal sosial yang sedia ada. Selain itu, terdapat tujuh badan NGO yang dijadikan subjek untuk kajian ini. Semua transkripsi dianalisis secara kualitatif menggunakan perisian Nvivo. Keputusan kajian yang telah dibuat menunjukkan peranan NGO dalam membekalkan bekalan makanan kepada golongan gelandangan di sekitar Kuala Lumpur beroperasi di antara ikatan dan jenis perhubungan modal sosial. "Ikatan-Perhubungan MS" menyatakan bahawa pihak NGO lebih peka untuk bekerja secara individu daripada bekerjasama dengan pihak NGO yang lain dalam usaha untuk menyelesaikan masalah yang membabitkan golongan gelandangan di sekitar Kuala Lumpur. Walau bagaimanapun, terdapat juga aktiviti yang dibuat dengan kerjasama pihak NGO yang lain. Tambahan pula, mereka mempunyai jaringan hubungan yang sangat besar bersama syarikat yang kecil atau yang besar yang terdapat di dalam atau di luar pihak NGO ini. Dengan kewujudan hubungan modal sosial yang berasaskan kepercayaan moral ini dalam kalangan pihak NGO, penyediaan makanan kepada golongan gelandangan di

sekitar Kuala Lumpur diuruskan dan dipantau agar setiap NGO sedar akan aktiviti yang dijalankan oleh setiap NGO yang lain. Dalam isu perkembangan masyarakat gelandangan, pihak NGO boleh membuat kerjasama dengan lebih meluas agar dapat memberikan impak yang besar memandangkan isu golongan gelandangan di Kuala Lumpur semakin meningkat.



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*"In everything he did he had great success, because the LORD was with him."  
~1 Samuel 18:14*



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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

At present, homelessness is one of the most inevitable issues in many countries in the world when it comes to social matter. Aside from the fact that the number of people who experience this phenomenon increases, its nature also continuously changes over time. The perception of the public on homelessness had changed since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beyond, from the hoboes and tramps to skid rows to the mentally-challenged to racism and inequality. While it is true that case of homelessness tends to be greater in developing countries, we cannot hide the fact that the same phenomenon also takes place even in developed countries. UN reported that even countries with high income experience homelessness because of rapid urbanization and structural changes in the society (Levinson & Ross, 2007). Housing improvements in urban communities has limited the low income households from having an access to cheap housing. This contributes to the increasing homelessness of the poor. The rise of globalization has been also said to have a negative impact to the low sector of society since small-skilled workers are fired from their jobs due to technological advancements thus reduction of them becomes the norm. Also, government's reduction on social services for public's welfare contributed to the growing issue (UN Habitat, 2000). Moreover, migration caused by city urbanization fluctuated for the past 4 decades due to the perceived "greener pasture" waiting for people. While majority perceived rural-urban migration as a grand means to escaping poverty, negative effects on taking the step was still consequent. This has augmented the previous percentage of urban poor residents making families and individuals face various problems which most of the time push them to become homeless (Azman & Sulaiman, 2011). On his report tackling on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, Miloon Kothari said that United Nations has an estimate of approximately 100 million homeless people worldwide and around 1 billion people with inadequate housing (UN Commission on Human Rights, 2005) and a big percentage of them can be seen lumping in urban settings. While statistics might be reliable, it may not project the real or exact number of homeless in this case because countries have its own yardstick in counting or even determining its homeless population. Furthermore, most of the homeless are dynamic people who freely go from one place to another making it more complex to assess its real exact figure. However, though statistics may seem to be vague, solving the challenges of homelessness is still inevitable as it may possibly cause wider and more extensive social problems when not given a focus. In relation to this, Abraham Maslow in his Hierarchy of Needs highlighted the idea of satisfying or meeting first the most basic needs of human being to ensure its survival and development of its other areas in life. Shelter is one among these basic needs. Thus, highlighting the concern to reduce homelessness means to be against

other societal problems such as human abuse, crime, health & behavioral challenges, and extreme poverty.

For the past years, combating the issue of homelessness is taken into consideration by different institutions, private and public alike. Public institutions or the government as a whole had their own means in alleviating homelessness. As for the developed countries like United States, the use of Emergency Shelters is one of the services that the US government offer to the homeless population. These shelters provide basic needs such as beds and meals to more complex services such as treating the substance abused, introducing job placement skills, assisting the domestic violated ones, and providing house assistance. Length of stay in the shelters depends upon their imposed policies. Majority of the shelters discharge their clients each morning and re-admit them during afternoons. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) allocates fund for the service shelters that cater the homeless which is available to faith-based or secular organizations and local government agencies (Nooe & Patterson, 2010).

Moreover, HUD also funded a Transitional Housing program which focus is on the facilitation of transfer or movement of the previous homeless to a permanent housing. Unlike emergency shelters, it is smaller and more particular in addressing behavioral changes and support linkages through its programs. For a continued stay, served individuals must participate the trainings and programs offered. Basically, assistance given covers up to 2 years until homeless are already settled (Levinson & Ross, 2007). In 2002, HUD also created a program called Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) focusing on the chronically homeless by providing 150,000 permanent housing units with the goal of their reintegration to the main stream of the society (Nooe & Patterson, 2010; Drury, 2008). Moreover, in 2009, the Australian Government made a Social Inclusion agenda focusing on combating homelessness through reducing the number of the disadvantaged, escalating participation on social, civil and economic, collaborative solutions, and prioritizing early preventions. While the focus of the policy was on the “rough sleepers” or those people sleeping in the open and streets, it was reported that within the year 2009-2010, 1 in every 100 Australians used the government service (Zufferey, 2011).

While public institutions offer these kinds of support to the homeless, the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) in alleviating homelessness is also noteworthy and becoming more and more significant. In a study done about the role of NGOs in the governance of homelessness in Hungary and Slovenia, it has been shown that NGOs played significant role in catering services for the homeless by initiating and running majority of the programmes in temporary shelters and rehabilitation homes. Also, because of the NGO’s expertise in dealing with marginalized groups, the local government prefers to seek their aid in executing services for the homeless. In both countries, NGO’s role in filling the gap for service provision is seen significant though differs in some ways. In Hungary, NGOs are the main service players so majority of the services

provided to the homeless are brought by them since they are the front liners in any emerging problems that arise. While the central government provide the local government and NGOs with fund, the central government has no direct role in service delivery. On the other fence, NGOs in Slovenia are regarded only as complementary providers though they excel in providing basic needs such as foods and clothing (Hrast, Somogyi, & Teller, 2009). With the advancing roles NGOs execute, the need then to explore Social Capital amongst NGO food support providers for homeless would be a great contribution in the social sciences specifically in understanding the roles NGOs could embark on the issue of homelessness, it will also be a fuel for sectors in pursuit of community development. Thus, this study focuses on NGOs that supply food for the homeless in Kuala Lumpur, however, it is only limited to NGOs who are actively providing food.

Meanwhile, in the US, Emergency Food Assistance System (EFAS) is run by private organizations, whose main goal is to complement the unmet roles of the government specially in catering the low-income or underprivileged population which includes the homeless, old people, single parent families, families with children, working poor and the unemployed. With its *Emergency Kitchens* or *Soup Kitchens* and *Pantries*, clients are served with their basic family needs such as groceries and meals set in community-based locations away from the main distribution sites (Levinson & Ross, 2007). Their existing program is regarded to be important in safety food provision in the US and this is evident on the million numbers of clients they have annually (Briefel *et al.*, 2003).

## 1.2 Problem Statement

Some previous research on social problems like the study of Jamil & Muriisa (2004) about the role of NGOs in mitigating HIV/AIDS challenges showed the competencies of NGOs in Social Capital formation. Aside from solidarity created within the organizations, there also exist inter-organizational linkages among the NGOs. Globally speaking, NGOs are becoming well-known in different societies because of their many successes in providing social services especially in developing countries (Hadiwinata, 2004; Bromideh, 2011).

In the issue of homelessness, traditionally, planning and execution of interventions against poverty lies within the central government or government partnering with private institutions. Meanwhile, interventions made showed small impact on people as only a small percentage is being reached by the programs made considering that a high cost of expenses are used. This dilemma faced by majority of the government sectors paved the way for NGOs and other community organizations to get involved in the process. Their innovative interventions of giving opportunities to low-income groups attracted the public sector to explore better and more efficient ways that would impact the poor (Arrossi *et al.*, 1994). Today, NGOs play significant roles in service provision - ranging from policy-making to direct contact with the homeless population. Community Development is just one of the many end goals of these

civic organizations who are committed to impact the society by eradicating poverty and its underlying causes. NGOs' works in alleviating societal problems have been acknowledged throughout the years to be useful and highly helpful especially amongst the small-scaled people, as their expertise focuses on the grassroots in the society. Their programs and initiatives for the homeless specifically are not only bounded to housing provision per se but even in providing other welfare aids making them a more holistic organization. Nevertheless, there are also challenges being faced by the NGOs towards working for the homeless population which includes Government-NGO disparity due to NGOs preference of working independently from the government in order to avoid decision-making problems. Meanwhile, there are also governmental policies and laws which limit the extent of NGOs in executing their roles. Other challenges include limited financial capacity, lack of inter-organizational communication and coordination, sustainability and limited understanding on the broader social and economic context, as well as limited manpower and fluctuating number of volunteers (Bromideh, 2011).

In other countries, while the central government or the public sectors manage to offer some grants and funding for the NGOs, national homeless policies are usually overlooked like in the case of developing countries (Hrast *et al.*, 2009). In Malaysia, Alhabshi & Manan (2012) argued that homeless people receive not a large amount of attention because there is no policy under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD) that has direct bearing to homelessness. Despite of this fact, various organizations like Non-Governmental Organizations and other civil society organizations extend their help to the homeless especially in providing food support. But while these organizations in Kuala Lumpur cater the needs of the homeless, assurance for inter-organizational linkages among the organizations seems to be vague. To be able to render a quality service that would impact the homeless, NGOs should work collectively since each of them has its own area of focus. Thus, network among various NGOs needed to be able to meet the needs of people. Also, collaboration between government and civil society is needed and that more impact is made when social capital is present. Presently, in the issue of food provision in Kuala Lumpur, it is perceived that there is no clear mark whether NGOs collaborate with other NGOs in dealing with the homelessness challenges, as well as if they network among each other and if social capital exists among them. This is important to look into to be able to determine the extent of association they have which in effect determine the impact of their services to the homeless.

It is important to note that while NGOs provide food for the homeless, assurance on systematic food distribution should not be taken for granted. Hence, without trust, network and collaboration amongst NGOs, two assumptions are considered:

- (1) There are certain days when homeless may receive no food
- (2) There are certain days when homeless may receive an oversupply of food

The above mentioned assumptions can be responded with the presence of social capital amongst NGOs to ensure the regular and systematic food provision to the homeless. Moreover, it is expected that presence of social capital have to exist amongst these NGOs to be able to create a greater impact in the issue of support services for homelessness. Thus, in this study, an investigation on the existing Social Capital amongst the Non-Governmental Organizations is regarded to be of an equal important for the welfare of the homeless population. Social Capital strengthens civil society, and civil society means all the structures created by people voluntarily in pursuit of their interests which seek to help individuals, families and communities. This means that having SC leads to developing the community (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006). Suffice to say that the Social Capital resting amongst NGOs play an essential role for the development of the community.

But the above statements need to be verified in this research. Therefore, a need for an in-depth study on the social capital amongst the NGOs is seen as vital in order to verify the existence of systematic everyday food support of the different organizations. This study will focus on the social capital amongst the Non Government Organizations that provide food support to the homeless in Kuala Lumpur. Hence, this research attempts to seek answers to the following research questions:

- (1) Who are the NGOs involved in providing food for the homeless?
- (2) To what extent these NGOs play their role in assisting the homeless?
- (3) What type of Social Capital does exist amongst NGOs in playing their roles?

### **1.3 General Objective**

The general objective of this study is to explore the existence of Social Capital amongst the various Non-Governmental Organizations in Kuala Lumpur that provide food support for the homeless in order to understand the status of the NGO community on impacting the homeless population.

### **1.4 Specific Objectives**

- (1) To identify Non-Governmental Organization Food Support providers for the homeless
- (2) To understand the roles the NGOs are playing in assisting the homeless specifically on food assistance
- (3) To identify the type/s of Social Capital that exists amongst NGOs who provide food support to the homeless

## 1.5 Operational Definition

### 1.5.1 Homeless

Homeless can be defined in many ways as stated by Springer (2000) depending on the point of view you're looking at. Researchers have focused on the issue of "literal homeless" in order to set a common ground in defining who the homeless are. For this matter, homeless are defined as the "people staying in shelters for the homeless, on the streets, or in other similar settings (e.g., in abandoned buildings, in makeshift structures, or in parks)" (Levinson & Ross, 2007, p. 37). Also, other researchers who look at the gamut of literal homeless to the steadily-housed are aware of the many other homeless falling between these continuums.

Currently, there is no adequate definition on "homeless" in Malaysia due to its complex nature. But with the study done by Alhabsh & Abdul Manan (2012), homeless in Malaysia constitutes people who are sleeping in shop frontage with roof and floor, temple compounds, other public places, room costing around 30-50 Ringgit per night, and temporarily stay to friends and relatives house. Majority of them are physically fit and hold odd jobs. These people have gone through stressful and problematic life events.

For the purpose of this study, homeless will be those people who don't have permanent access to any proper shelter or housing, sleeping in places not meant for human habitation like under bridges, side-walks and other open public places or they are known as being street people. Homeless will also include the urban poor who receive food support from the Non-Governmental Organizations.

### 1.5.2 Non-Governmental Organizations

A vast number of written materials provide scholars a lot of definitions about Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Arrossi *et al.* (1994) stated that the growing number of definitions of NGO primarily in the Third World countries is a clear cut indication of increasing societal interest in understanding NGOs roles. From the existing definitions, five (5) general characteristics are seen to exist for an organization to be considered as NGO:

- (1) Formal organizations
- (2) Involved with public interest issues and concerns
- (3) Independent from government and state institutions
- (4) Non-profit making
- (5) Self-governing with an independent decision-making body

Moreover, Mooney & Evans (2007, p. 179) stated that “technically, an NGO is any organization which is independent of and not founded by a state.” It’s a term generally associated to non-profit organizations which set up can be either a very small organization termed as Community Based Organization (CBO) or globally operating organization. Whereas, NGOs in the context of this research will be the non-profit organizations providing food support in plates or in packs to the homeless in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

### **1.5.3 Social Capital**

“Social capital” is believed to be first coined by Karl Marx in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which generally revolves on the idea of social ties, networks or connections to people as well as norms that provides benefits to individuals and community. The term became more prominent in the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the works of Robert Putnam who defined SC as “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (Mooney & Evans, 2007). Furthermore, strategically, this concept is being used by grassroots community movement for community building and empowerment.

Social Capital will be defined as the trust, network and collaboration existing amongst the NGOs where: Trust be defined as the bond between the NGOs and the homeless, as well as the NGOs with other NGOs; Network be defined as the relationship between the NGOs providing Food support to the homeless and individuals, groups or agencies such as the government or other private companies they are in contact with; and Collaboration be defined as the relationship existing amongst the NGOs.

### **1.6 Limitation of the Study**

There were only a few empirical studies on the homelessness in Malaysia. This is supported in the study done by Alhabshi & Manan (2012) about *Homelessness in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: A Case of Agenda Denial* in which they argued that only a handful of academic write-ups tackling Malaysian homelessness do exist, and the probable reason they have assumed as to why this scarcity happens is because of the idea that homelessness is still relatively hidden to the public. With this regard, secondary data and information about the general status of the homeless accessed by the researcher might be limited. Also, there is no official data source of the list of Non-Governmental Organizations that provide food support to the homeless in Malaysia, specifically in Kuala Lumpur so that only those NGOs actively providing food for the homeless are included in the study. The respondents of this study are the NGOs that are focusing in KL, thus, result of the study should not be generalized with other NGOs in Malaysia.

## **1.7 Significance of the Study**

This study focuses on the NGO food support providers for the homeless in Kuala Lumpur with the intention to explore the existence of Social Capital among them. The results from this study can be used in generating new ideas in catering the needs of the homeless and a source of up-to-date information for the general public considering the idea that only a few number of empirical studies are executed and written regarding the role of NGOs to the homeless population. Also, NGOs and government sectors will have an awareness of the current status of food provision to the homeless in Malaysia specifically in KL area. And that through this, they would be able to review existing programs/projects or come out with possible actions and plans that would further benefit the homeless welfare. Lastly, the research findings will also provide insight to other researchers who are interested in embarking their works to community development which focus is on homelessness.

## **1.8 Theoretical Framework**

Using Robert Putnam's work on Social capital, the theoretical framework of this study will revolve on his idea. His definition of social capital is one of the most used definitions of scholars in exploring community development. Putnam defined it as "social organizations such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitates coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Rohe, 2004, p. 159). Furthermore, when looking into Social Capital, three common elements are always present: Trust, Networks and Norms or Culture (Schneider, 2009). Thus, three major facets are focused on in this study namely: Trust, Network and Collaboration in proving the existence and type of social capital amongst Non-Governmental Organizations.

(1) Trust is one of the most common elements of social capital that has been written in many literatures as presented by different authors. Also, it is "an essential ingredient of any successful community building effort" says Rohe (2004, p. 159) which according to him is a must-measure in assessing Social Capital. Furthermore, Cohen & Prusak (2001) argued that trust is an essential lubricant to any social activity as it preserves harmony amongst people. They further explained that without reasonable level of trust, there would be no commitment, cooperation and relationships taking place. (2) Network talks on social ties amongst people in a certain community, and ties are being strengthened by the sharing of information. As Coleman reported that information sharing is a vital element of social capital. (3) Collaboration which defines the collective action amongst individuals or organizations (Hutchinson, 2004).



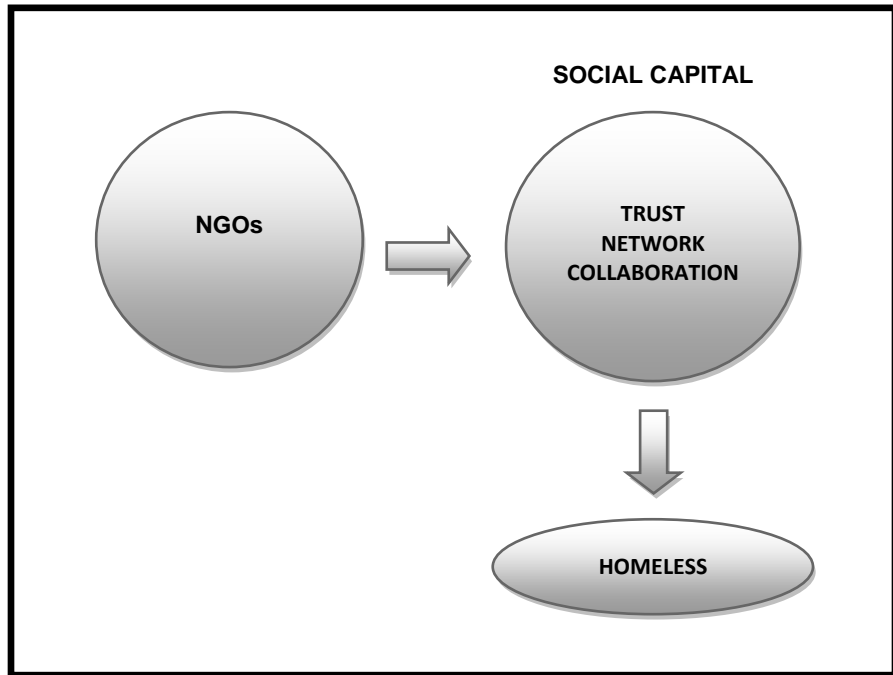


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework

Nevertheless, given that the focus of this study revolves on the relationship operating amongst the NGOs, Social Capital specifically, the use of the above framework of social capital gives a better picture in understanding the subject. Trust as an element of SC plays significant role on the role of NGOs as it ensures a better cooperation among the actors. Network on the other hand paves way to more access that will maintain or even strengthen the work of NGOs. Collaboration guarantees a greater impact that is efficient for the organizations and to the community where services are provided.

In relation to this, these three elements of Social Capital are seen significant to the NGOs' role for the homeless population. This proposes that having trust, network and collaboration, NGO food support providers could work efficiently and effectively in developing the homeless community by mitigating their basic needs. Thus, taking into consideration these three provides a clear scenario on the existing social capital of the NGO food support providers in Kuala Lumpur which would leverage the status of the homeless.

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